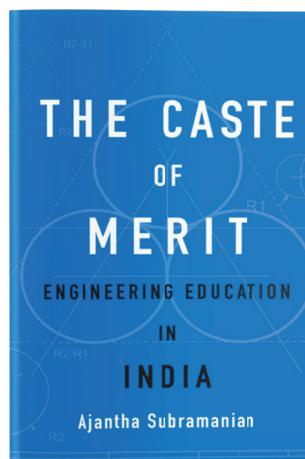


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Engineering Caste Privilege

In *The Caste of Merit*, Ajantha Subramanian unpacks the precise mechanics that power the engines of caste privilege

[*The Caste of Merit*] maintains that it is as precisely this gap between the social life of meritocracy and its universalistic promise that allows for the retrenchment of privilege. The hope for meritocracy as the transcendence of identity is a profoundly ahistorical aspiration that works against the actual redress of inequality. (p. 5)

On 30 June 2020, the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) filed a federal lawsuit under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA) of California against Cisco Systems and two managers—Sundar Iyer and Ramana Kompella—for discrimination, harassment, and retaliation¹. The suit alleges that managers at Cisco’s San Jose headquarters campus, which employs a predominantly South Asian workforce, ‘harassed, discriminated, and retaliated against an engineer because he is Dalit Indian’ (DFEH, 2020). The complainant was ‘expected to accept a caste hierarchy within the workplace where he held the lowest status within a team of higher-caste colleagues, receiving less pay, fewer opportunities, and other inferior terms and conditions of employment because of his religion, ancestry, national origin/

ethnicity, and race/color.’ As Thenmozhi Soundararajan of the US-based Ambedkarite organization Equality Labs points out, the Cisco case serves as a reminder ‘that tech is not a neutral place when it comes to caste’ (Sircar, 2020).

At stake in the Cisco case is the larger question of how engineering circles elide caste status and the notion of ‘merit’ in ways that protect *savarna* (or, ‘upper’ caste) privilege and marginalize Dalits. This is also the question that animates the anthropologist Ajantha Subramanian’s new book, *The Caste of Merit: Engineering Education in India*. Subramanian contends that the inherited status of caste and the ostensibly earned notion of merit are, in fact, deeply entwined. The Indian Institutes of Technology (or, IITs)—whose alumni include both the defendants as well as the complainant in the Cisco case—play a role in ‘transforming caste privilege into merit.’ The precise mechanics through which the system of meritocracy engineers caste privilege in technical education forms the subject of this book.

Subramanian argues that meritocracy is far from being a universal form of achievement that erases ascribed identities. Instead, merit takes the rearticulation of caste as its explicit basis by intertwining ascription and achievement. Such rearticulation is ‘not simply the assertion of already constituted caste identities’ but, ‘claims to merit generate newly consolidated forms of upper casteness that become the basis for capital accumulation’. In other words, merit is caste made new.

Subramanian takes as her field of study one of the oldest and most prestigious institutes of technical education in India: the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IITM). Research in the colonial archives along with oral history interviews with early IITM alumni supplement ethnographic fieldwork in her efforts. The resulting interdisciplinary work tells the history of IITM and the larger debates around technical education in the colonial and postcolonial periods, focusing specifically on the ways in which caste and the ideology of merit overlap and sustain each other in technical education. *The Caste of Merit* is a major contribution to our understanding of caste in contemporary India and presents an exemplary case of ‘studying up’² to unpack the workings of this protean and enduring system of discrimination and privilege. In Subramanian’s telling, caste is neither a remnant of old-fashioned thinking nor a passive failure of the liberal promise; rather, it is an active process of discrimination and a privileged closing of ranks that hides behind the attractive and misleading label of ‘meritocracy.’

The theoretical backdrop against which Subramanian stages her account is an invigorating mix of Dalit Studies, especially its trenchant criticisms of caste in modern and unmarked space such as the university, and critical race theory, particularly the study of whiteness as privilege and property. Numerous scholars, journalists, and activists have written about the forms of caste discrimination on university campuses in post-Mandal India.³ Most existing work, however, leaves untouched the logic of meritocracy, with the exception of Satish Deshpande, whose influential formulation of ‘castelessness’ makes him an important theoretical interlocutor for this book’s arguments. In contrast to Deshpande’s formulation of upper caste identity in university spaces as ‘the unmarked universal citizen,’ which allows them to claim a ‘casteless’ position (Deshpande, 2013), Subramanian argues that meritocracy is first and foremost

a caste-marked form of identity whose social practice undermines its universalistic promise.

Subramanian's nuanced understanding of merit as privilege and property develops in dialogue with theorizations of whiteness within critical race theory. Among these scholars, George Lipsitz's study of the 'possessive investment' of white identity politics, and Cheryl Harris's analysis of the ways in which white privilege took subtler forms following the segregation-ending ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, prove most helpful to Subramanian in theorizing 'upper casteness' as privilege and property.

The first chapter traces the colonial development of technical education in India through a strategic deployment of caste imaginaries, distinguishing between professional engineering education and industrial technical training. Subramanian shows that the social distinction between the mathematical knowledge of an engineer and the manual skill of a technician—or, put another way, the unbreachable walls separating the world of the IITs from the world of the ITIs⁴—are a product of caste thinking, policy, and practice.

In chapter two, Subramanian attributes the IITs' particular brand of institutional exceptionalism to the Sarkar Committee Report of 1945, which recommended the formation of higher technical institutions that were 'to be set apart, not only from industrial schools for artisans and workers but also from the regional engineering colleges.' The IITs' autonomy from regional state governments, local university administrative structures, and their centralized national-level examination allowed them to realize 'a vision of further institutional stratification' with higher technical institutions at the top. Caste permeated these stratified institutions as social reality and metaphor: while autonomy insulated the IITs from democratic politics and ensured the reproduction of caste, the metaphor of caste continued to signal merit. The persistence of caste as metaphor was, in fact, foundational to the nascent state's technological ambitions: if Nehru consecrated massive technological projects as 'the temples of modern India,' he also valorized the engineer as nation-builder infused with 'the Brahminic spirit of service.'

The ways in which various value systems collided to define IITM's ethos forms the subject of chapter three. The first of these was, of course, caste. The struggle against Brahminism in Tamil Nadu by the Justice Party and later the Dravidian movement enabled the emergence of a strident critique of technical institutions as *agraharams*⁵ of privilege. Another collision formative to IITM was brought about by the collaboration between West German engineers, who valued practicality and hands-on experience, and their Brahmin counterparts, who hierarchalized mind over body through a casteist distinction between mathematical conceptual knowledge and manual skilled labour.

The fourth chapter anchors the book's narrative in the life histories of early IITians. Subramanian introduces key themes here that get fuller treatment in the following chapters; among them, the 'unmarked' nature of upper caste presence in (and entitlement to) IIT, and the attraction that IITs held especially for Tamil Brahmins (so well-known that the Tamil press⁶ dubbed the institute as 'Iyer Iyengar Technology'). Reflecting upon a 1960s alumnus bemoaning the newly-emergent post-

Mandal 'caste consciousness' that had even 'infected' IITM, Subramanian points out that 'the comfortable inhabitation of an unmarked upper-caste category in the early post-independence years, especially within elite spaces like the IITs [...was] made possible by the near absence of anyone who was explicitly marked as lower caste.'

Such reticence in acknowledging caste did not extend to Tamil Brahmins who were attracted to the IIT examination because it allowed them to evade the regional quotas for lower castes. Subramanian notes the Tamil Brahmin self-image as 'ordinary, middle-class people [who] prioritized education,' but analytically resists this savarna perspective to emphasize the 'structural and affective entanglements' of caste and class.

The two chapters that follow describe the pressures put on the ideology of merit as a proxy for 'the dialectic between ascription and achievement.' Chapter five describes the role of the IIT-JEE examination in positing the IITs as meritocracy in action, and the changing demographics enabled by the 'coaching factories,' which bring in non-Brahmins caste elites who are seen to be the 'wrong kind of upper castes.' Chapter six describes the ways in which reservations enable Dalits and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) to access these exclusive spaces of caste privilege, and the resentful savarna view of reservations as unmeritorious because it 'dilutes the gene pool.' These two chapters show the challenges to the ideology of merit: first, from the market through the JEE coaching industry, and second, through the legal and political route through reservations. Together, they make the book's key argument that 'meritocracy is rarely just a universalistic politics of achievement [... rather it is] also always about particularistic ascription.' In other words, merit is never neutral, particularly in those spaces where it purports to be so, and its unmarked presence nearly always obscures savarna hegemony.

The modern competitive examination plays a prominent role in perpetuating the myth of meritocracy by supposedly creating a level playing field that values achievement and not ascription, the exam comes to 'symbolize meritocracy.' The IIT-JEE, in particular, is seen as 'a national arbiter of merit.' Subramanian argues that examinations act as 'filtering mechanisms [that] favour those who come from histories of education and have a facility with this technical instrument.' They 'reinforce rather than unsettle commonsense understandings of relative merit.' The examination mobilizes the dialectic between ascription and achievement in three specific ways: first, they provide a gatekeeping function by regulating access in ways that eliminate most aspirants from candidature⁷; second, they offer cultural certification that act as 'proxies for ascription'⁸ which eventually contribute to the naturalization of talent; and third, the examination generates gradations of rank that are important not only during their time at IIT but throughout their careers.

The IIT-JEE rank—a serialized technocratic analogue of the graded inequality of caste—is 'common currency at the IITs.' Since 'everyone knows one another's rank, and this knowledge is part of everyday discourse,' it indicates not a one-time performance in an examination but future success or failure. The overlap between IIT-JEE rank and the ascription-achievement dialectic becomes apparent in the commonsense understanding of knowledge and intelligence as 'innate' or 'true merit.'

The pressures to conform to the ascriptive logic of possessing innate true merit led students to ‘feign a lack of effort.’ ‘You have to act,’ admits one alumnus, ‘like it all somehow just comes to you.’

The growth of the coaching industry as a mass phenomenon generated anxieties among the upper castes that led to new distinctions such as ‘boutique classes’ versus ‘coaching factories’ and the related binary of ‘the gifted’ versus ‘the coached.’ The boutique classes emphasize conceptual knowledge and cater to the (exceptional, cerebral) gifted student while the coaching factories merely produce the (generic, mechanistic) coached student. Once again, technical education in India hinges upon the caste-coded value binary of knowledge versus labour. These distinctions are ‘exercises in social boundary making,’ which echo the colonial distinction between the cerebral mathematical conceptual knowledge of engineers and the embodied mechanistic labour of technicians.

Reservations mounted ‘a more fundamental challenge than the coaching industry to the IITs’ claim to meritocracy.’ However, while reservations ‘acknowledged caste discrimination as the basis of non-achievement,’ they did not address ‘caste inheritances as the basis of achievement.’ Reservations thus offer ‘only a partial critique of meritocracy.’

The Tamil Brahmins are a case in point: they presented themselves, on the one hand as ‘citizens of a liberal democracy’ who challenge reservations on the grounds that it violated constitutional principles of formal equality and non-discrimination, while on the other, they argued that ‘as Brahmins, they were quintessentially meritocratic.’ The interplay between ‘their civic unmarking as liberal democratic citizens and their cultural marking as caste subjects’ has given their claims to merit both ‘a universalistic and an identitarian character.’

The tension between formal equality and substantive inequality—or, between constitutional mandate and lived reality—is not a recent phenomenon. Subramanian discusses three landmark Supreme Court judgements—the 1951 Champakam Dorairajan case, the 1992 Indira Sawhney case, and the 2008 Ashoka Kumar Thakur case—to point out that the language and logic of the judiciary had shifted from being ‘upholders of a liberal legalist vision’ to that of ‘technocrats working to engineer the perfect balance of outcomes.’ This propensity for technocratic language paralleled that of the upper castes, who ‘similarly shifted from using only the language of formal equality to increasingly relying on the terms of reservation policy.’ The logic of opposing reservations has given the upper castes ‘a new language of hierarchical classification,’ allowing them to position themselves as ‘members of the meritorious ‘general category’ [which has become] the basis not only for caste distinction but increasingly for caste consolidation.’⁹

Subramanian’s emphasis on meritocracy as a technology for caste consolidation leads her to advance Deshpande’s influential argument about the normative ‘castelessness’ of upper castes. Subramanian asserts that ‘the marking of caste as culture, as natural aptitude [or, innateness], as the very basis for merit’ meant that ‘upper castes did not think of themselves as casteless.’ Rather, ‘there was a tension between marking and unmarking at the heart of claims to merit.’ Tamil Brahmin

claims to merit—characterized by civic unmarking and cultural marking—show that meritocracy is never only ‘a universalistic politics of achievement’ but remains caste-marked by being always also ‘about particularistic ascription.’ The importance of this argument, coming at a time when the judiciary rules to undermine reservations, wholesale privatization moves public sector jobs beyond the ambit of reservations, and the legislature misrepresents the spirit of reservations by extending it to savarnas, cannot be overstated.

The rethinking of merit as product, technology, and ideology of caste privilege is this book’s central offering to the study of caste. In particular, the theoretical shift from Deshpande’s argument about the normative unmarked castelessness of upper castes to Subramanian’s understanding of meritocracy as a technocratic logic of caste-marked discrimination has tremendous political significance for India’s rapidly transforming higher education sector. Contrary to Deshpande’s view of casteless upper caste identity as the absence of disadvantage, Subramanian extends our understanding of caste-marked meritocracy as first, a property that solidifies a possessive investment in caste capital; second, a technocratic means of consolidating caste distinction; and third, a new ideology that obscures the social transformation of caste. Merit, in Subramanian’s view, is not a neutral measure of accumulated talent possessed by casteless moderns. Rather, merit is a form of caste privilege that consolidates and veils the ways in which caste controls access to opportunity, defines talent, and above all, measures success.

Merit, as a technocratic means of caste consolidation, depends on accurate identification of an individual’s caste. Subramanian provides a gloss of these ‘diagnostic practices’ which includes (casteist and unreliable) assumptions on the part of alumni that reserved candidates struggle with academic performance, lack English language fluency, and that their roll numbers are grouped. That each of these diagnostic practices is unreliable suggests the complex ways in which caste is embodied, perceived, and understood in contemporary India.

The only reliable diagnostic practice is, ironically, the one with the greatest claim to indicate neutral merit: the IIT-JEE rank. The JEE rank functioned as ‘the marker of social and intellectual standing on campus,’ which followed students well beyond graduation into their jobs. A JEE rank below a certain cutoff automatically outed students as reserved candidates and therefore as unmeritorious. The (unethical) practice of prospective employers collecting JEE ranks on job application forms means that this diagnostic practice effectively transfers into their employment records and becomes a mode of caste discrimination through technocratic means. Subramanian cites a Facebook post by an anonymous Dalit alumnus, which concludes: ‘What’s the difference between your grandfathers who might have called my grandfather an untouchable? You have changed the name to reserved candidate.’ Merit, the anonymous author leaves us in no doubt, is caste by another name.

The final chapter traces the global expansion of ‘Brand IIT,’ and the shift in the gatekeeping logic of meritocracy from ‘gene pool dilution’ of the homeland to ‘brand dilution’ of the diaspora. ‘The absence of caste as a public identity in the diaspora, cautions Subramanian, ‘does not preclude its structural and affective workings.’ Indeed, the significance of the Cisco case is not that it represents the first instance of

diasporic caste discrimination but that it is the first major public recognition of the pervasive presence of caste as an often veiled, occasionally disavowed, but always practised identity.

Given the historical significance of mobility to caste, Subramanian characterizes 'elite and private domestic and transnational arenas as spaces of upper-caste flight and retrenchment away from the pressures of lower-caste politics.' The historical processes that have led to the diasporic Brand IIT—a combination of Indian state developmentalism, the rise of lower-caste politics, and US immigration policy—have equated being upper caste, being Indian, and having 'merit.' Moreover, they have shifted the meaning of merit from intellectualism to entrepreneurship. The IITians of Silicon Valley, in particular, have reinforced notions of Indian technical merit—with its roots in casteist policy and practice—while shrouding from view the presence of caste.

The arrival of the Silicon Valley IITian enmeshed the diasporic engineer and the entrepreneur through a four-stage process that began with, first, the IITians flagging their institutional pedigree more explicitly; second, creating a pan-IIT institutional kinship; third, giving tangible form to this kinship sentiment through organizations such as the Pan-IIT Alumni Association; and finally, ensuring media coverage of Brand IIT. Subramanian presents a fluent—and chilling—retelling of the diasporic IITian worldview, which she memorably describes as 'diasporic liberation theology [that] places the nation's deliverance squarely in the hands of the U.S.-based IITian.' In this self-congratulatory worldview, the IITs were 'a beacon of light' dispelling the darkness of Indian state socialism, whose graduates had to migrate to avoid 'the mediocrity produced by socialist conditions.' By bringing 'the spirit of entrepreneurship' back to the homeland, the diasporic IITian would cultivate a new generation of capitalists who could 'once and for all remove the nation's shackles of socialism.' What the entrepreneurs feared most of all was 'brand dilution' of IITs, and by extension, of the Indian entrepreneur, and, therefore, of all of India!

One of the most significant contributions of this book is its formulation of 'upper casteness.' This concept is both more accurate in describing the emergent forms of caste capital accumulation and more nimble-footed in keeping pace with the rapid transformations of caste in the twenty-first century than existing concepts describing upper caste consolidation such as M N Srinivas's dominant caste, Rajni Kothari's entrenched castes, K. Balagopal's provincial propertied classes, or Kancha Iliaih's neo-Kshatriyas. Subramanian's capacious formulation of upper casteness joins cause with similar articulations within Dalit Studies that have insisted on taking into account the ideological, ritual, and performative forms of domination as well as the material, technological, and institutional forms of caste consolidation.

If thinkers of Dalit Studies have understood caste to be 'institutionalized in the modern state as a form of power and as a source of privilege,' they have also 'contested the tendency to treat caste only as an instrument of oppression (untouchability, violence and dehumanization) and recreated it into a new identity of self-assertion and pride' (Satyanarayana and Tharu, 2011). These emergent forms of solidarity and community on higher education campuses such as IITM appear in the concluding

chapter. There, Subramanian notes the impact of the May 2014 election of Narendra Modi on the campuses of IIT Madras, University of Hyderabad, and Jawaharlal Nehru University. Particularly significant developments are the formation of the Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle at IITM and its growth at other institutes across the country in response to temporary ‘de-recognition’ by IITM administration, and the rapid growth of the Ambedkar Student Association across the country following the tragic suicide of Rohith Vemula, which was widely interpreted as institutional murder. Both groups have followed a similar trajectory of emergence, institutional opposition, and defiant growth. In the coming years, this book will be a critical resource to understand the growth of these anti-caste student groups and the changing dynamics between caste and merit brought about by the newly-instituted Economically Weaker Section quota.¹⁰ Perhaps with an eye on this emergent scenario, Subramanian cautions that while ‘meritocracy as a principle continues to animate calls for equalization,’ we must call into question the assumption that meritocracy can ever be ‘a leveler of opportunity’ for it has historically serviced the reproduction of inequality.

This book challenges theorizations of caste that focus on its systematization, givenness, or textuality, and instead turns our gaze towards political processes of exclusion through which caste privilege is gathered, reproduced, and protected. Caste, this book shows, is neither survival from the pre-modern past—a nauseating claim repeated most often by those who continue to benefit from it—nor is it only a ritual or religious phenomenon. In Subramanian’s telling, it becomes clear that caste informs and inflects even that hallowed core belief of neoliberal capitalism: merit. Moreover, the portrait of caste that emerges here is neither one that can be entirely systematized by, say, *varnashrama* or the colonial ethnographic state, nor is it so localized as to defy any attempt at capacious theorization. Rather, the consolidation of upper casteness made possible through the notion of meritocracy—and built on the separation of embodied practical industrial skilled labour and conceptual mathematical theoretical knowledge—constitute a new poetics of caste practice that bridge the old and the new, the colonial and the postcolonial, the local and the global.

To return to the Cisco case: it is the entrenched casteist logic of this poetics of practice that allowed the Brahmin defendants to harass the Dalit engineer. They are—as one character gushes in Sandipan Deb’s hagiography, *The IITians*, which Subramanian re-reads critically—the ‘new Brahmins, except that they wouldn’t be reading the scriptures, they would be technocrats.’ If anything, Subramanian demonstrates the continuities between the old and ‘new Brahmins,’ and, in the process, provides a clear portrait of caste in contemporary India and its grasping transnational tentacles.

The Caste of Merit is Subramanian’s second book, coming after *Shorelines: Space and Rights in South India*. If *Shorelines* studied the rights claims and caste modernity of the fisher community, *The Caste of Merit* shows the exclusionary mechanisms of caste privilege within the framework of modernity. Together, these two works represent the ways in which the protean dangers of caste interact with the enduring possibilities of modernity.

The Caste of Merit will appeal most particularly to anthropologists of caste, historians of modern India, and scholars of Dalit Studies, and more generally, to

anyone working in or on South Asia. Moreover, the book is relevant to anyone living with South Asians, for, as the Cisco case shows, caste is a malaise that we South Asians have taken with us wherever we have gone. In a time when struggles across the world are forging transnational solidarities, this book situates the reproduction of upper casteness through meritocracy within a global context by making generative connections with critical race theory.

The Caste of Merit is, ultimately, the case against merit. In revealing the precise mechanics through which the ideology of merit becomes a technocratic tool of caste, Subramanian makes a significant contribution not only to the study of caste but, more importantly, to the struggle against caste.

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Endnotes

- 1 As this article was going to press in late October 2020, news emerged that the California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) voluntarily dropped the federal lawsuit against Cisco for caste discrimination. The DFEH has however suggested that it will re-file the complaint in a state court. For more, see *The Wire* (2020). Subsequent reports have quoted DFEH spokesperson that the case has been filed in the county court at Santa Clara, California. For more, see *Money Control* (2020, October 22) and *Indica News* (2020, October 23).
- 2 'Studying up' refers to Laura Nader's famous exhortation to analyze 'the culture of power rather than the culture of the powerless, the culture of affluence rather than the culture of poverty' (289). This task of studying up involves 'principally studying the most powerful strata of urban society' (289), which would involve studying down as well, leading to a comparative framework which anthropology is uniquely equipped to deal with for it has 'specialized in understanding whole cultures in a cross-cultural context' (293, original emphasis). See Nader (1972). Up the Anthropologist, *Reinventing Anthropology*.

- 3 To name only a few scholarly accounts: Sukhdeo Thorat and Katherine S. Newman, *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India* (2012); numerous articles including the introduction in the dossiers edited by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu: *No Alphabet in Sight* (2011), and *Steels Nibs are Sprouting* (2013); Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering caste* (2003); K. Balagopal, *Ear to the Ground* (2011); Samson Ovichegan, *Faces of Discrimination in Higher Education in India: Quota Policy, Social Justice and the Dalits* (2015); Satish Deshpande, *Caste and Castelessness: Towards a Biography of the 'General Category'*, (2013); *Exclusive Inequalities: Merit, Caste and Discrimination in Indian Higher Education Today*, (2006); and Pass, Fail, Distinction: *The Examination as a Social Institution*, (2010); as well as more recently, Gaurav Pathania, *The University as a Site of Resistance: Identity and Student Politics* (2018). Excellent journalistic accounts in the wake of Rohith Vemula's institutional murder by Sudipto Mondal, Praveen Donthi, and Nikhila Henry, including her book *The Ferment: Youth Unrest in India*, have made significant contribution towards our understanding of caste in contemporary India. Important reports by activist-scholar collectives include, most notably, the Thorat Committee Report of discrimination at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi (2007), and Anweshi Report of student suicide at the University of Hyderabad (2013).
- 4 ITIs are Industrial Training Institutes which are, as their name suggests, dedicated to technical training that produce skilled labour for engineering industries. The alliterative similarity to IITs notwithstanding, the ITIs produce manual labour—'technicians'—while IITs produce knowledgeable managers—'engineers'. This difference between IITs and ITIs, Subramanian shows, is one of caste reproduced through the ideology of meritocracy.
- 5 Exclusive Brahmin settlements in South India are called agraharams. The usage of this term by the Justice Party and the Dravidian movement criticises technical institutes as exclusive Brahmin spaces by comparing them to agraharams.
- 6 This reference to the Tamil press is one of only two such instances in the book: the other being a quote by an interviewee who refers to two leading Tamil magazines, *Kalki* and *Ananda Vikatan* (234). Given the robust print culture in Tamil Nadu and the history of non-Brahmin critical thought, this chapter in particular and perhaps the book as a whole may have benefitted from greater engagement with Tamil language mainstream media and critical thought.
- 7 Subramanian relies on the important study by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean- Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* (1977), which argues that 'the inequalities between the classes are incomparably greater when measured by the probabilities of candidature [...] than when measured by the probabilities of passing' (p.155). The concern articulated by Bourdieu and Passeron, which Subramanian echoes, is not that non-elite candidates will not make the jump, rather they are not permitted entry into the arena.
- 8 The term is Satish Deshpande's. See 'Pass, Fail, Distinction.'
- 9 The months following the book's publication have shown this dynamic between the judicial opinions on reservations policy and upper caste consolidation through the logic of merit even more apparent: the Supreme Court has ruled on two separate occasions in the first half of 2020 that reservations were not a fundamental right in appointments and promotions. Once again, targeted technocratic chiselling allows savarna discourse to weaken the logic of representation and equity that lies at the base of reservations. Feb 7, 2020, and June 11, 2020. See Jeenger, 'The Supreme Court Must Note That Reservation Is a Fundamental Right,' *The Wire*.

- 10 The EWS quota, which came into force in 2019, sets aside 10 percent of higher education seats and public sector jobs for communities hitherto not eligible for reservations and meeting various other criteria such as having an income below eight hundred thousand per annum and owning less than five acres of agricultural land. In effect, the EWS is reservations for savarna communities. See '10% reservation for economically weak in general category comes into force,' *The Times of India*, and Faizan Mustafa, 'An Expert Explains: New quota and basic structure,' *The Indian Express*. Appeals against the EWS quota are currently under consideration by a constitutional bench at the time of writing in August 2020. See Apurva Vishwanath, 'EWS quota law: what a five-judge Constitution Bench will look into,' *The Indian Express*.